



Education Overview



Roger Williams Park Zoo Education aspires to engage program participants as active partners in conservation. We aim to develop a community of critical thinkers who have the skills necessary to be effective conservation advocates and active community members. Emotional connections are also prioritized, as our teaching engages the mind and the heart. Using our unique resources, we provide experiences that advance scientific literacy, while inspiring wonder, awe, empathy, curiosity, and an emotional connection to wildlife, wild places, and each other.

Our Method

- Our programs are inquiry-based & experiential, encouraging discovery, deep knowledge gains, and emotional resonance
- We understand the power of a 'profound experience' and the importance of helping our participants make memories that last a lifetime
- Lessons are grounded in science, but multi-disciplinary, cutting across curricular lines
- Our focus is on authentic content, utilizing our unique resources including our collection, zoo campus, and field conservation initiatives
- We provide participants with do-able conservation actions that have a real impact on our world, empowering our community to see themselves as part of the solution, and weaving them into the mission of Roger Williams Park Zoo
- We draw on several proven pedagogical approaches including Reggio Emilia and Constructivism
- We encourage and foster a growth mindset; it is ok to fail, and often our best lessons come from failure paired with continuing to try, thus growing our understanding
- We emphasize social learning (whether in a classroom setting or in a family visit)
- Ambassador Animals are always presented respectfully, encouraging understanding, empathy, and awe
- We believe in the power of play, and foster a fun atmosphere that supports this important aspect of learning





Understanding our Audiences

- We scaffold our lessons based on age-appropriate content and approaches; building empathy and understanding with our youngest learners; emphasizing exploration, discovery, and global context with our elementary-aged students; delving into stewardship and responsibility with our older participants
- Our programs strive to understand participants' expectations and needs while encouraging them to find meaning relevant to their personal experience
- Our staffing structure allows us to specialize in specific audience sector needs and priorities, with area managers for school programs, family programs, general visitor programs, and early learner play-based programs
- We prioritize inclusive program design, taking into account a diversity of learning styles and needs, and respecting diverse cultural experiences that inform participants' learning

Quality

- Our efforts are always evolving and are informed by current best practices from disciplines including conservation psychology, play study, visitor studies, and pedagogical research
- Our programs are developed and assessed using specified outcomes determined by our mission and audience needs. We use the findings of these assessments to constantly improve our efforts
- Programming is aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards, and we work closely with the Rhode Island Department of Education, colleagues in higher education, districts, and classroom teachers to ensure we meet the most pressing needs of schools and students

